

Seneca's 'fortuna' in fourteenth-century Italy and Anselm's ontological proof

Article

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Seneca's fortuna in fourteenth-century Italy and

Anselm's ontological proof

Seneca's reputation as a theologian in fourteenth-century Italy is bound up in part with an extraordinary passage from the main Preface to his only scientific work, the Naturales quaestiones. Writing towards the end of his life - he died AD 65 - to his close friend and Stoic disciple, Lucilius, Seneca drew on earlier Greek and Latin authors, especially Aristotle, for his description and explanation of celestial and other natural phenomena such as comets, hail-stones, lightning, thunder, rainbows, earthquakes and floods. Apparently unknown to Carolingian copyists, the treatise surfaced only in the twelfth century, bristling with textual difficulties, and with the books in the wrong order for a start. It was drawn on for scientific material by William of Conches, whose first version of the Dragmaticon philosophiae was composed about 1130, and then by Adelard of Bath, Hildegard of Bingen and Honorius Augustodunensis. In the thirteenth century, Robert Grosseteste made use of it as did Roger Bacon. Derivative in nature, it was soon overshadowed by the growing tide of Aristotle's numerous scientific treatises with Arab commentaries, all translated into Latin.¹

The Prefaces to some of the books, and the moral essays closing them, can be detached from the factual discussions on natural phenomena. The main Preface in particular provides a succinct lesson in natural theology; it recommends the study of astronomy to Lucilius and other readers as the surest path to knowledge about God. Seneca opens by distinguishing two branches of philosophy: 1) that which deals with man and what is done on earth, and which guides us through the uncertainties of life; and 2) that which deals with the gods and what is done in heaven, and which, transcending earth's gloom, leads us to light's very source. The former branch is ethics, the latter physics - which in antiquity included both natural philosophy and natural theology. To penetrate the mysteries of the universe, Seneca says, is to learn about its maker. By contemplating the minuteness of the earth, a mere pinpoint in the immensity of space, the mind finds its proper home in the heavens. And then comes the extraordinary passage:

There at last, the mind learns what it has long sought; there it begins to know God. What is God? The mind of the universe. What is God? All that is visible and all that is invisible. Only if he alone is all things, if he maintains his own work from within and without, is his magnitude at last restored to him - than which nothing greater can be imagined. What, then, is the difference between our nature and the nature of God? In ourselves the better part is the

mind, in God there is no part other than the mind. He is entirely reason. (See quote 1 from Table at end of article; underlining here and in later quotes mine.)

God's reason at work in the universe is divine providence. Seneca scorns those - he has in mind the Epicureans - for whom celestial phenomena take place by chance. To study creation is to rise above one's own mortality. 'Having measured God,' Seneca concludes, 'I know that all else is petty.'²

Since F.S. Schmitt in his critical edition of Anselm's *Proslogion* in 1938 named the above passage as a source for the conclusion to Anselm's famous ontological argument for the existence of God - 'We believe that you are something than which nothing greater can be imagined' (quote 6) - scholars have been asking whether Anselm had read a copy of *Naturales questiones*. The results have been inconclusive one way or the other.³ We may never be in the position to prove that Anselm was consciously recalling Seneca when he completed his ontological argument. But even if he was not, I nevertheless support K.-D. Nothdurft's points that Anselm's words are in fact closer to Seneca than to any other known source, and that the Middle Ages did catch the striking resemblances between the formulations of pagan Seneca and later Christian thinkers like Augustine, Boethius and Anselm himself (quotes 1 to 6). Nothdurft cites a thirteenth-century commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, for example, in which Augustine,⁴ Anselm and Seneca are all seen to agree that 'God is that than which something greater cannot be imagined'. (Quote 8.)⁵

In this paper I would like to turn the relationship between Anselm and Seneca the other way round. Leaving aside whether Seneca was important for Anselm's proof for the existence of God, I am going to suggest that Anselm's words and similar ones of Augustine and Boethius are important for Seneca's reputation as a natural theologian, even a divinely inspired one, in fourteenth-century Italy. The association of Seneca with such authoritative divines adds to his well-established image in the Middle Ages as a moralist and saintly ascetic, and reinforces attempts to prove Seneca's friendship with St Paul and his secret conversion to Christianity.

The Middle Ages revived a Seneca already filtered and distorted by the eyes of Latin Fathers of the Church: ascetic writers of the third, fourth and fifth centuries like Tertullian, Ambrose and - of most importance for Seneca - Jerome; and also apologists of the fourth and fifth centuries like Lactantius and to a lesser extent Augustine. Two features in particular approved by these Fathers endeared Seneca to the Middle Ages as well: 1) the Stoic doctrine of divine providence; and 2) the transformation of heroic virtue performed for its own sake into the supreme ethical value, with a consequent disparagement of pleasures of the senses increasingly linked with

vitium. Cicero's *De natura deorum*, Book II, an account of Stoic natural theology, argued that nature works for a purpose partially discernible to man's reason. The design, order and harmony in creation, especially in the heavenly bodies, are meant to persuade us of the existence of an intelligent, good and provident god.⁶ Christian Lactantius lifted the section on the purposeful design on the human body into his own treatise, *De formatione hominis*. (Both Cicero's exposition and Lactantius's treatise are taken up by Petrarch in the fourteenth century and become staple ingredients in the many treatises on the dignity of man in the Italian Renaissance.)⁷ Seneca relies on Cicero for the first Preface of *Naturales quaestiones*, but he also extends the discussion of providence to human suffering. Why, he asks in *De providentia*, if there is a good God, do misfortunes befall good men? Seneca answers that evil is only apparent; in the long run everything happens for a good purpose, although our limited point of view prevents us from understanding this. No evil befalls a good man anyway, for whatever he suffers is sent by a divine father to test his virtue and strengthen it as fire purifies gold – an analogy common to Seneca and the Old and New Testaments.⁸ Lactantius and Augustine, often hostile to Stoic ethics, follow Seneca closely and also agree with him that suffering justly punishes evil men.⁹

The conflict between virtue and pleasure as ethical goals, set forth by Cicero in *De finibus*, Book II, is fundamental to most of Seneca's moral essays, and especially pronounced in *De vita beata*. Here, reason, virtue, that elusive Stoic goal called the *honestum*, and that even more elusive creature called the *sapiens* – the perfect embodiment of reason and virtue – make up the blessed life of the Stoic. At the opposite Epicurean pole are grouped pleasure, madness, the dishonourable or *turpe*, and the vast majority of mankind. Parrying the Epicureans, Seneca allows that their founder may himself have been a sober man, but his followers 'fly to a mere name seeking some justification and screen for their lusts'. Pleasure is the enemy; it weakens the fibres of the mind, 'steals in through every opening, softens the mind with its blandishments, and employs one resource after another to seduce us in whole or in part'.¹⁰ Such strictures, taken literally and repeated in countless ascetical treatises of Church Fathers – and later medieval writers – were exaggerated by Jerome, who claimed to find an ally in Seneca in his own battles for celibacy against marriage, chastity against sexual indulgence. In one of his invectives widely read in the Middle Ages, *Adversus Jovinianum*, he gives the impression of quoting from a lost treatise of Seneca against the philosopher/ascetic marrying.¹¹

The Middle Ages also inherited from Latin Church Fathers a number of *testimonia* to Seneca's saintly character. Tertullian called him 'one of our own', meaning that Seneca often expressed Christian sentiments.¹² Lactantius quotes or mentions Seneca twenty-two times, calling him 'the most intelligent

of all the Stoics', and culling passages from now lost works where Seneca speaks like a profound moralist and theologian.¹³ Jerome gives the most important recommendation of Seneca. In a paragraph-long biography, he calls Seneca 'a man of a most chaste life', and includes him 'in catalogo sanctorum'. This ambiguous phrase referred in all probability to a list of religious writers Jerome was compiling at the time, in 392, but it was taken to mean that Jerome counted Seneca among the Christian saints. Jerome also speaks elsewhere of 'our Seneca'. He no doubt meant 'Seneca who writes in Latin rather than Greek', but was taken to mean 'Seneca a Christian like us'.¹⁴ Medieval readers did not realise that for the most part Church Fathers projected a poor, pure and unworldly Seneca. Classical sources on Seneca, which were studied fully for the first time in Italy in the fifteenth century, showed him on the contrary to be immensely wealthy, adulterous, and deeply involved in public administration and court intrigue under three Roman Emperors who all ended up hating him.¹⁵

Spurious works gradually attributed to Seneca, like De quattuor virtutibus, De paupertate and collections of Proverbia, enhanced his reputation as master of the spiritual life.¹⁶ The most important forgery is undoubtedly a correspondence he and the Apostle Paul supposedly carried out while at Rome together. Jerome first mentioned it in 392, but it began to enjoy wide circulation only in the eleventh and most of all the twelfth centuries attached to Seneca's most influential - and genuine - Letters to Lucilius, the Epistulae morales. In the correspondence, Seneca emerges a sympathetic and admiring student of Paul's Epistles. He confesses that powers higher than merely human ones, a holy spirit even, are at work in Paul. Paul, on the other hand, believes that God has singled out Seneca for special favours; he is a fertile field in which the seed of the word of God will yield a hundred-fold. Paul sends Seneca forth like an apostle to preach to the Emperor Nero and his household. Although it is nowhere stated that Seneca was baptised and openly confessed Christianity, I would agree with Erasmus that the sense of the correspondence is to persuade us to that opinion.¹⁷

Together with the passage from Naturales quaestiones, Seneca's Letters 58 and 65, and sometimes 41, are alluded to or quoted in the writers I shall examine. These Epistulae morales show him once again as a natural philosopher and theologian, and as a metaphysician. In Letter 58, Seneca explains the six meanings Plato gives to ousia, translated into Latin as essentia, a word coined by Cicero. Discussing ideas, Seneca interprets Plato to mean everlasting patterns or exemplars by which everything in nature is produced. God himself is the most outstanding being, 'greater and more powerful than everything else'. Letter 65 relates Aristotle's four causes to Plato's ideas. 'God has within himself the patterns or ideas of all things,' Seneca declares, fruitfully misinterpreting Plato. In the same Letter, Seneca compactly summarises the activities of the father-architect in Plato's Timaeus, who brings

forth the best possible universe out of his goodness and directs it according to his providence. What is the first cause? 'Ratio ... faciens, id est deus,' Seneca concludes. ¹⁸

The link between Naturales quaestiones and the Letters sketched above on the one hand and early fourteenth-century Italians is, I believe, the twelfth-century School of Chartres, noticeably Platonic in its concerns. Chalcidius's commentary on Plato's Timaeus, Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy, Augustine and Seneca were studied there in large part for their metaphysical and scientific - i.e. cosmological - value. It should not be forgotten that until Aristotle's scientific works were known, Plato's Timaeus, and comments on it found in Boethius and Seneca, were a main source of cosmology. Much energy was spent reconciling Plato's doctrines with the Biblical account of creation in Genesis, a task obligingly given impetus by Augustine when in the City of God (VIII, v-xi) he pronounced the Platonists closest to Christianity of all ancient philosophical schools, and the Timaeus another version of Genesis, with a minor change here and there. ¹⁹ The acknowledged founder of the School, Bernard of Chartres, who died in 1130, was hailed as 'peritissimus inter Platonicos' by his disciple John of Salisbury, but it has been shown that his writings make use of Seneca. William of Conches (1080-1145), who perhaps quoted Naturales quaestiones for the first time in the Middle Ages, also wrote a commentary on Boethius copied and corrected in part by Nicholas Trevet, the first author with Italian connections I shall discuss. John of Salisbury (1120-1180) furthermore not only demonstrates explicit knowledge of Augustine and Boethius in his Metalogicon (IV, 35), but also cites a part of Seneca's Letter 58 on the Platonic ideas. ²⁰

Although an English Dominican, Nicholas Trevet had close ties with Italian scholars early in the fourteenth century. Trevet's own commentary on Seneca's Tragedies, which made him a well-known figure in Italy, was composed at the request of Nicholas of Prato, a fellow Dominican and Italian Dean of the College of Cardinals at Avignon after the transfer of the Papacy there from Rome. Perhaps through the good offices of Nicholas came ties with early Italian humanists. Trevet was definitely in Florence and Pisa before 1304, remaining several months in Florence to write his commentary on Boethius. As a high-ranking and learned Dominican he may have been present at the 1308 General Chapter of his Order held in Padua, a centre for the revival of Seneca in Italy, thanks to the efforts of Lovato Lovati and Albertino Mussato, whose introductory remarks to Trevet's commentary on Seneca's Tragedies we shall turn to in a moment. ²¹ Trevet's famed commentaries on Seneca, Boethius and Augustine's City of God were more widely copied on the continent than in England. ²²

In the one on Boethius, both Seneca and Augustine support

the author of the Consolation of Philosophy and one another. In the Preface, Trevet quotes copiously from Seneca's Epistulae morales, giving the impression that both authors share similar views about the efficacy of moral philosophy to serve as consolatio in the Stoic sense, strengthen the will, and free the mind and heart for higher things. Trevet quotes Letter 48, for example: 'For that is what philosophy promises to me, that I shall be restored as equal to God'.²³ The Consolation of Philosophy takes many commonplaces from the Stoics which can be found just as well in Seneca: the opposition of fickle Fortuna and her deceptive gifts to steadfast Philosophia or reason; self-mastery based on control/suppression of the passions; virtue as its own reward. Book IV follows Seneca's De providentia very closely as it seeks to persuade us that evil is only apparent and that the virtuous do not really suffer. More to the point, in Book III, Prose X, Boethius seems to adapt Seneca's Naturales quaestiones:

That God, the principle of all things, is good is proved by the common concept of all men's minds; for since nothing better than God can be imagined, who can doubt that that than which nothing is better is good? (quote 5).

Slight differences in the wording are noticeable: Boethius says 'nothing better', melius; Seneca, 'nothing greater', maius; Boethius quæat for 'can be'; Seneca possit. Interestingly, in the medieval Italian MSS I have consulted, Seneca's text has Boethius's excogitari for 'imagine', which brings them closer together.²⁴ Now when Trevet comes to comment on the above passage, he paraphrases Boethius in words that embrace both Seneca and Anselm; furthermore he follows immediately with a quote from Augustine which tells us that the Church Father too has said the same:

It should be of help to know that the Latin word deus comes from the Greek theos ... nevertheless according to spoken usage, especially in Latin, any listener understands the word 'God' to mean that than which nothing greater or better can be imagined. Hence blessed Augustine says in De doctrina explaining how God is thought of: 'He is thought of in such a way that the act of thought strives to reach something than which there is nothing better'. (quote 7).

Albertino Mussato of Padua, who died in 1329, and who wrote the first tragedy in classical metres following Seneca since antiquity, draws on Seneca's Letters 58 and 65 – the same two used by medieval Platonists – to support his view of Seneca as 'a keen debater in natural philosophy'.²⁵ In his introduction to Trevet's commentary on Seneca's Tragedies, he is, I believe, the first openly to pronounce Seneca a convert to Christianity,

albeit a hidden one, because of the St Paul-Seneca correspondence. Mussato singles out sections in the forged letters where Seneca recognises that Paul's wisdom is divinely revealed and where the philosopher speaks of a holy spirit. Mussato does not fail to tie that last reference to genuine Letter 41 where Seneca does indeed say: 'God is near you, beside you, within ... a holy spirit - sacer spiritus - dwells in us, one who marks our good and bad deeds and is our guardian'.²⁶ Mussato calls Seneca an observant astronomer, a sharp dialectician, 'extraordinarily skilled in the moral arts, a philosopher of Christian doctrine and a hidden supporter of Christians'.²⁷

Seneca's gifts as a theologian, however, are manifested above all in his tragedies. Applying the Pauline verse, 'Paul planted and Apollowatered' to Seneca's literary activities, Mussato would have his readers understand that Seneca drew both on the divine revelation communicated to him by Paul and on the finest offerings of Latin poetry inspired by the Muses and ultimately by Apollo.²⁸ He is a poetic theologian, excelling in all knowledge human and divine:

Lest he might seem lacking something from what is knowable to human powers, he engaged in composing poetic theology after he had written almost all his other works so as to show himself clearly a theologian and a poet in the same work.²⁹

The first poets were, in fact, natural theologians who used allegory to veil their doctrines in order 'to lead their listeners to divine contemplation with greater wonder'.³⁰ Elsewhere in a defence of the use of myths in poetry, Mussato interprets some admittedly suggestive verses from Seneca's Hercules furens on the future sufferings of the newly-born Bacchus as an allegory of Christ.³¹

The first commentary on the St Paul-Seneca correspondence, though anonymous, has been attributed to Nicholas Trevet. At any rate, it is seen to have originated in a scholastic milieu, and to belong to the early fourteenth century. It is found in two MSS now in Oxford, Bodley 292 and Balliol 130, both of which are believed to be copies of earlier Italian MSS.³² The first contains several commentaries of Trevet on Seneca, including the already-mentioned commentary on the Tragedies - hence the attribution - and the second a corpus of Seneca's works. This anonymous commentary is also found in a British Library MS, Harley 2268, an assortment of Italian humanist works, mainly of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

The commentary quotes both our passage from Seneca's Naturales quaestiones and Letters 65 - about God having within Himself the patterns or ideas of all things - and 41 - about a holy spirit dwelling in man. Seneca

is praised for defending divine providence against materialists and fatalists, described respectively as pre-Socratics and Arab commentators on Aristotle:

Providence itself, you see, disposes all the parts of the body in man, just as Seneca in Book I of *De quæst. nat.* says that this very providence is the mind of the universe ... Because just as mind pervades the whole body by means of its light and power, so the light of the sun pervades the air and all things are subordinated to it and receive their forms through it ... And so, evidently, divine providence is at work in the universe because providence itself is that which pervades all things, and all things are subordinated to it and receive their forms through it. ³³

Nothing is outside the control of divine providence, particulars and universals, sense and intellectual objects. Averroes would limit the knowledge and causation of God, but, the commentator protests, 'we confess that God himself is the cause of all that exists, and so he knows everything insofar as he is the cause of everything'. ³⁴ One is reminded once again of Letter 65, where Seneca likened Stoic *ratio* to Aristotelian *causa*, and where he defined the first cause as *ratio ... faciens*. So convinced is the commentator of Seneca's monotheism that when he finds the use of the plural *dii* in the spurious correspondence, he exclaims: 'But God according to Seneca in Book I of *De quæst. nat.* is that than which nothing greater can be imagined. But it is plain that this is but one'. Seneca may have been referring to angels. ³⁵ Seneca is also praised for teaching the creation of the individual soul by God; his orthodoxy is contrasted on the one hand with those who preach Platonic pre-existence of the soul - such as Boethius (Book III, Verse IX) - and on the other hand with Arab commentators and Epicureans who deny its immortality. The St Paul-Seneca correspondence, it should be pointed out, has next to no philosophical or theological content; the commentator superimposes and exaggerates a view of Seneca as a theologian derived from our passage and its associated tradition. ³⁶ In the commentary Seneca is the recipient of divine revelation. He may have been a Christian, i.e., confessed the faith and received baptism, but the commentator is uncertain.

Like Nicholas Trevet, the Dominican Giovanni Colonna spent some years at the Papal court at Avignon, arriving there in the 1330s and leaving in 1338 for Rome, where he died five years later. He corresponded with Petrarch, who addressed eight letters to him in *Familiares*. While at Avignon, Colonna wrote a biography of Seneca, part of a collection, *De viris illustribus*, in which he, too, declares that Seneca became a Christian. ³⁷ Colonna has been considered the first to say so, but as Mussato was already dead before Colonna started writing, the merit should go to the poet and tragedian from Padua. ³⁸

Colonna documents the case for Seneca as a Christian theologian more completely than any other scholar. He must be the first to exploit the many quotes about God by Seneca found in Lactantius's Divinae institutiones, among which stands out one (quote 2) almost reiterating Naturales quaestiones. Lactantius is warning us that we should not think we can get away with doing evil because no human eyes see us:

He in whose sight we live knows all things. Even if we can hide our [crime] from all men, we cannot from God, from whom nothing is hidden, nothing can remain secret. Seneca ends his Exhortationes with a marvellous statement in support of this. 'There is a great god - I do not know what could be imagined greater - for whose sake let us take pains in living. Let us make ourselves acceptable to him. It is no use to conceal our conscience; we lie open to God.'

As far as I know, this passage from Seneca's lost Exhortationes had not been adduced before as a possible source or even a parallel for Anselm. It can now be stated that Seneca says the same as Augustine, Boethius and Anselm in two distinct works rather than only one! ³⁹

Seneca, Colonna continues, believed in a God above all other gods, ruler of heaven and earth, who gives us life and takes it away, who is not served by the bloody sacrifices of animals but by a pure heart and a will bent on doing good. ⁴⁰ Colonna also brings to bear on Seneca's theology passages from other writings, about a holy spirit dwelling in man, the end of the world ordained by God, and the giving by God to each man an angel to guard him. ⁴¹ Colonna is even sure that Seneca in Consolatio ad Helviam discourses about the divine Trinity:

Wherever we go, two most attractive things will go with us: universal Nature and our own virtue. Believe me, this was the intention of the great creator of the universe, whoever he may be, whether an all-powerful God, or incorporeal Reason designing vast works, or divine Spirit pervading the greatest and the smallest things with equal energy. ⁴²

It would seem that Colonna was moved to search Seneca's writings for theological statements because he was so convinced about Seneca's Christianity, 'proved', asserts Colonna, 'by those letters which Paul wrote to Seneca and Seneca wrote to Paul'. ⁴³

By the late 1300s and early 1400s in Italy, Lactantius had replaced the Naturales quaestiones and Letters 58 and 65 as a reliable source for remarks about Seneca's theology. Domenico de' Peccioli's commentaries on

Seneca's *Letters to Lucilius*, circulating at the end of the century, assume that Seneca is steeped in the teachings of Paul and through Paul of Christ. This high-ranking Dominican refers to thoughts of Seneca about God the judge, ruler of heaven and earth, and God the creator of a universe, nothing greater or better than which could have been made by nature.⁴⁴ The quotes are the same as ones adopted by Giovanni Colonna, an earlier Dominican, and they are used again by Gasparino Barzizza in his *Life of Seneca* preceding commentaries on the *Letters* of 1411. Barzizza, a university lecturer at Padua and later at Milan, develops more fully than others the image of Seneca as a hidden believer.⁴⁵ Neither of these commentators presents Seneca as a natural philosopher. The early fourteenth-century wave of interest in Seneca as a natural theologian is overtaken later in the century by emphasis on Seneca the moralist *par excellence*, a trend aided in part by numerous commentaries on Dante's *Divina Commedia*, where Seneca is placed in Limbo and called '*Seneca morale*' (*Inferno*, IV, 141). Even Giovanni Boccaccio, expounding Dante in the 1370s, does not defend Seneca as a theologian, although presenting detailed evidence about his supposed death-bed conversion.⁴⁶

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Table of quotes

1. Illic demum discit quod diu quaesiit; illic incipit deum nosse. Quid est deus? Mens universi. Quid est deus? Quod vides totum et quod non vides totum. Sic demum magnitudo illi sua redditur, qua nihil maius cogitari potest, si solus est omnia, si opus suum et intra et extra tenet. Quid ergo interest inter naturam dei et nostram? Nostri melior pars animus est, in illo nulla pars extra animum est. Totus est ratio ...

Seneca, Naturales quaestiones, Praef. 13-14.

NB. MSS consulted of thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and printed editions of 1522 and 1540 all give excogitari and vacillate between quia nihil and quo nihil.

2. Scit enim ille omnia, in cuius conspectu vivimus. Nec si universos homines celare possumus, Deum possumus; cui nihil absconditum, nihil potest esse secretum. Quod Exhortationibus suis Seneca mirabili sententia terminavit. 'Magnum', inquit 'nescio quid maiusque quam cogitari potest numen est, cui vivendo operam damus. Huic nos adprobemus. Nihil prodest inclusam esse conscientiam, patemus Deo'.

Lactantius, Divinae institutiones, 6, 24, 12-13.
quoting a lost work of Seneca.

3. Neque enim ulla anima umquam potuit poteritve cogitare aliquid, quod sit te melius, qui summum et optimum bonum es. Cum autem verissime atque certissime incorruptibile corruptibili praeponatur, sicut ego iam praeponebam, poteram iam cogitatione aliquid adtingere, quod esset melius deo meo, nisi tu esses incorruptibilis.

Augustine, Confessionum, Liber VII, iv.

4. Nam cum ille unus cogitatur deorum Deus ... ita cogitatur, ut aliquid quo nihil melius sit atque sublimius illa cogitatio conetur attingere ... Omnes tamen certatim pro excellentia Dei dimicant; nec quisquam inveniri potest qui hoc Deum credat esse quo melius aliquid est. Itaque hoc omnes Deum consentiunt esse, quod caeteris rebus omnibus anteponunt.

Augustine, De doctrina christiana, I, vii.

5. Deum rerum omnium principem bonum esse communis humanorum conceptio probat animorum. Nam cum nihil deo melius excogitari queat, id quo melius nihil est bonum esse quis dubitet?

Boethius, Philosophiae consolatio, III,
Prose x.

6. Et quidem credimus te esse aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit.

Anselm, Proslogion, 2.

7. Est autem adiutandum quod 'deus' dicitur a 'theos' grece ... tamen secundum usum loquentium precipue in lingua latina, intelligitur per hoc nomen 'deus' a quocumque audiente significari id quo magis (other MSS: maius) vel melius cogitari non potest. Unde dicit beatus Augustinus in ... De doctrina ... docens quomodo cogitatur deus: 'ita cogitatur ut aliquid quo nichil sit melius illa conetur cogitatio attingere'.

Nicholas Trevet, O.P., Commentary on Boethius, MS Vat. Lat. 562, saec. XIV, f.69v.

See quote 5, Trevet died some time after 1334.

8. Item, secundum Augustinum et Anselmum et Senecam De quaest. nat. ... Deus est illud quo(d) maius nequit excogitari ...'

Walter von Brugge, Commentary on Peter Lombard, Sentences, quoted by K.D. Nothdurft.

NOTES

1. This article is a slightly expanded version of a paper read at the Third International Anselm Conference held at the University of Kent at Canterbury, 2-5 July 1979. For N. Q. in the Middle Ages, see L. Thorndike, A History of Magic and Experimental Science, London 1923-58, I, 100-103, passim; C. Picard-Parra, 'Une utilisation des Q. N. de Sénèque au milieu du XII^e siècle', Revue du moyen-âge latin, 5 (1949), 115-126; K.-D. Nothdurft, Studien zum Einfluss Senecas auf die Philosophie und Theologie des Zwölften Jahrhunderts, Leiden Cologne 1963, esp. pp.162-181 - by far the most thorough survey, and pp.192-7 on 'Aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit'; M. Spanneut's review of Nothdurft, 'Sénèque au moyen-âge. Autour d'un livre', Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale, 31 (1964), 32-42; and his own Permanence du Stoïcisme de Zénon à Malraux, Gembloux 1973, pp.182-4. For a modern reappraisal of the MS tradition, untouched since the beginning of this century, see H.M. Hine's articles: 'Escorial MS O III 2 and related manuscripts of Seneca's Natural Questions', Classical Quarterly, N.S. 28 (1978), 296-311; 'The manuscript tradition of Seneca's Natural Questions; some manuscripts related to Z (Geneva lat. 77)', Prometheus, 5 (1979), 63-72; and 'The manuscript tradition of Seneca's Natural Questions', Classical Quarterly, N.S. 30 (1980), 183-217.
2. 'sciam omnia angusta esse mensus deum.' Praef., 17. Text and translation by T.H. Corcoran from Loeb Classical Library edition, London and Cambridge, Mass. 1971. Similar thoughts expressed in Letters 41, 58 and 65 to Lucilius, discussed below.
3. S. Anselmi Opera Omnia, I, 102; see also further parallels and sources in M. J. Charlesworth's notes to the Proslogion, Oxford 1965, pp.55-7. Catalogues of the monastic library at Bec where Anselm composed this work include N.Q., but the earliest was compiled between 1142-64. Anselm left Bec for Canterbury in 1079. See G. Becker, Catalogi bibliothecarum antiqui, Bonn 1885, p.202. The earliest certain borrowings from N. Q. are in William of Conches's Dragmaticon, composed about 1130, and the earliest extant MSS date from the end of the century.
4. While Augustine is generally held to be the main inspiration for Anselm, neither he nor any other predecessor, Seneca included, use their formulations to prove the objective existence of God from the subjective concept.

5. Nothdurft, op. cit., p.195, from E. Longpré, ed., 'Questions inédits du Commentaire sur les Sentences', AHDLM, 7 (1932), 258.
6. See M. Spanneut, Le stoïcisme des Pères de l'Eglise, Paris 1957, and his La permanence du stoïcisme; H. Hagendahl, Latin Fathers and the Classics, Gothenburg 1958; J. Quasten, Patrology, Utrecht 1953; G. Gawlick, 'Cicero in der Patristik', Studia Patristica, 9, Berlin 1966, 57-62. Some pagans thought of suppressing De nat. deor. as it was so useful to Christians wishing to undermine traditional Roman religious beliefs.
7. See discussion by C. Trinkaus, In Our Image and Likeness, London 1970, I, 179-97, for the continuity of the misery/dignity of man literature from Patristics to Petrarch, Salutati and Lorenzo Valla.
8. Seneca says: 'Ignis aurum probat, miseria fortes viros', V.10. He also compares providence to a stern father who treats his children severely to make them strong: Man is 'vera progenies, quam parens ille magnificus, virtutum non lenis exactor, sicut severi patres, durius educat', I, 5; and 'operibus doloribus, damnis exagitantur, ut verum colligant robur', II, 6. Indeed, God tries those he loves: 'Deus quos probat, quos amat, indurat, recognoscit, exercet', IV, 7. In the Old Testament, cf. Proverbs XVII, 3: 'Sicut igne probatur argentum, et aurum camino: ita corda probat Dominus'. On fatherly correction of God, Prov. XIII, 24: 'Qui parcit virgae, odit filium suum'; and above all, in the New Testament, Hebrews XII, 6-7: 'Quem enim diligit Dominus, castigat: flagellat autem omnem filium, quem recipit ... Tamquam filiis vobis offert se Deus: quis enim filius, quem non corripit pater?'
9. Lactantius recommends De prov. explicitly to readers who wish to know why God allows the wicked to prosper and the good to suffer, Divinae institutiones, I, 5, 22. Augustine argues the same question in City of God, I, vii-ix, quoting only Scripture. When he resorts to explaining in rational terms why the good suffer, however, he says and would be seen as saying what Seneca had said. For a collection of quotes from and about Seneca in Patristic writings, see W. Trillitzsch, Seneca im Literarischen Urteil der Antike, Amsterdam 1971.
10. 'ad nomen ipsum advolant quaerentes libidinis suis patrocinium aliquod ac vela mentum', XII, 5: 'per omnes vias influat animumque blandimentis suis leniat aliaque ex aliis admoveat, quibus totos partesque nostri sollicitet', V, 5.

11. See Book I, 49, in particular, where Jerome explicitly mentions Seneca three times. On the vast diffusion of *Adv. Jov.*, see P. Delhay, 'Le dossier anti-matrimonial de l'*Adversus Jovinianum* et son influence sur quelques écrits latins du XII^e siècle', *Medieval Studies*, 13 (1951), 65-86; D.S. Silva and J.P. Brennan, 'Medieval Manuscripts of Jerome against Jovinian', *Manuscripta* 13 (1969), 161-6; R.A. Pratt, 'Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wives: Medieval Antimatrimonial Propaganda in the Universities', *Annale Medievale*, 3 (1962), 5-27.
12. 'Seneca saepe noster', *De anima*, 20, 1; Trillitzsch, *op. cit.*, II, 362.
13. 'Seneca omnium Stoicorum acutissimus', *Div. inst.*, 2, 8, 23; Trillitzsch, *op. cit.*, II, 364-8.
14. 'continentissimae vitae fuit. Quem non ponerem in catalogo sanctorum, nisi me illae epistulae provocarent ... Pauli ad Senecam aut Senecae ad Paulum ...', *De viris illustribus*, XII. 'Noster Seneca' appears in *Adv. Jov.*, I, 49.
15. Trillitzsch, *op. cit.*, II, 331-362. The most complete account of Seneca at court is given by Tacitus, a historian revived by Boccaccio only in the late fourteenth century. See R. Sabbadini, *Le scoperte dei codici latini et greci ne' secoli XIV e XV*, Florence 1967, p.29; and G. Billanovich, *I primi Umanisti e le tradizioni dei classici latini*, Fribourg 1953, pp.30-33.
16. G.G. Meersseman, 'Seneca maestro di spiritualità nei suoi opuscoli apocrifi dal XII al XV secolo', *Italia Medioevale e Umanistica*, 16 (1973), 43-135.
17. See Introduction, critical edition and commentary of L. Bocciolini Palagi, *Il carteggio apocrifo di Seneca e San Paolo*, Florence 1978. For Erasmus, see his 1529 edition of Seneca, where he composes a scathing Preface for the forged correspondence, p.690; for reprint, see P.S. Allen, *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi*, Oxford 1906-1958, VIII, 40-41.
18. 'maior et potentior cuncti', 58, 18. 'Exemplaria rerum annium deus intra se habet', 65, 7. Seneca transformed Plato's teaching according to which the ideas exist outside the mind and are perfect models. He denies the ideas this higher perfection; for the artist, they may be internal images or external models to copy. See E. Panofsky, *Idea, A Concept in Art Theory*, trans. from German by J.S. Peake, Columbia, S.C. 1968, pp.19-25.

19. On the School of Chartres, see E. Garin, Studi sul Platonismo medievale, Florence 1958, pp.47-150; T. Gregory, Platonismo medievale, Studi e ricerche, Rome 1958; and in general, D. Knowles, The Evolution of Medieval Thought, London 1962, esp. pp.131-140. Nothdurft discusses history of Letters 58 and 65, op.cit., pp.182-191. For the view that the School of Chartres should not be distinguished from wider scholastic currents, see R.W. Southern, Platonism, scholastic method, and the School of Chartres, the Stenton Lecture 1978, University of Reading.
20. Garin, op. cit., pp.47-53, and p.75.
21. Ruth J. Dean, 'Cultural Relations in the Middle Ages: Nicholas Trevet and Nicholas of Prato', Studies in Philology, 45 (1948), 541-64; and 'The Dedication of Nicholas Trevet's Commentary on Boethius', Studies in Philology, 63 (1966), 593-603. Also, R. Weiss, 'Notes on the Popularity of Nicholas Trevet, O. P. in Italy during the first half of the 14th century,' Dominican Studies, I (1948), 261-5; and B. Smalley, English Friars and Antiquity in the Middle Ages, Oxford 1960, pp.58-64.
22. Dean, 'Cultural Relations', p.547.
23. 'Hoc enim est, quod mihi philosophia promittit, ut parem Deo reddat', MSS Milan Ambros. F.79 sup. (saec. XIV) and D.44 sup. (saec. XV); Vatican Lat. 562 (saec. XIV) and 563 (dated 1400). LCL edition reads: 'ut parem deo faciat', 48, 11.
24. Italian and one English MSS I consulted all give excogitari in the Preface to Q. N.: Vat. Lat. 2216 (saec. XIII-XIV), 'quia nichil maius excogitari potest'. Vat. Lat. 2212 (saec. XIV), 'quo nichil maius excogitari potest'. Brit. Library Royal 5D X (saec. XII), 'quia nichil maius excogitari potest' (this MS contains indexing symbols of Robert Grosseteste). Vat. Urb. Lat. 1356 (saec. XV), belonging to Federico da Montefeltro, 'quia nichil maius excogitari potest'. Two printed editions - Venice, 1522; and Paris, 1540 - also give excogitari.
25. 'Naturalis philosophie ... disputator acutus', MS Vat. Lat. 1641 (saec. XV) from 'Lucii Annei Seneca Cordubensis vita et mores in hac prolocutione seu exordio operis secundum Albertinum Musatum patavinum et historicum', fols. 6^r - 7^v. Quote on 7^v. Trevet, Mussato and his friend Lovato Lovati also of Padua helped bring about a revival of Seneca's Tragedies. Lovati was apparently the first to unravel the classical metres of these plays, which Mussato

incorporated in his own Evidentia tragediarum Senecae, published by F. Novati in 'Nuovi aneddoti sul Cenacolo letterario padovano', Scritti storici in memoria di Giovanni Monticolo, Venice 1922. Mussato also wrote a Senecan tragedy, Ecerinide; see critical edition of L. Padrin, Bologna 1900. Although Mussato's summaries of the tragedies, Argumenta, found in this and other MSS, have been published by E. Franceschini, Studi e note di filologia latina medievale, Milan 1938, pp. 176-197, and more recently by A. Megas in Albertini Mussati Argumenta tragoediarum Senecae, Thessalonica 1969, the short vita discussed here has not. I am preparing a transcription for publication.

26. 'prope est a te deus, tecum est, intus est ... sacer intra nos spiritus sedet, malorum bonorumque nostrorum observator et custos', 41, 2.
27. 'moralium artium peritissimus, at philosophus christiani dogmatis et christianorum fautor tacitus', MS cit., fol. 6^r.
28. 'Ego plantavi, Apollo rigavit: sed Deus incrementum dedit', I Cor. iii, 6. Mussato is accommodating the words of Paul, who is in no way referring to the Greek god of medicine and the arts, but rather to a helper.
29. 'Neve ex his que scibilia sunt humane capacitati quicquam in eo defuisse videretur, post omnia fere alia opera que conscripserat theologiam poeticam exprimere sic curavit, ut in ipso opere theologum se patenter ostenderet et poetam', MS cit., fol. 7^v.
30. 'Primi enim verique poete philosophiam sub allegoriis enigmatibus similitudinibus ac transfigurationibus parabolis et figuris tecto quodam sub velamine utebantur, ut maiori admiratione auditores ad contemplationem divinam adducerent', fol. 7^v.
31. Passage reported and discussed by E. Garin, 'Frate Giovanni da Mantova e Albertino Mussato: poesia e teologia', Il pensiero pedagogico dello Umanesimo, Florence 1958, p. 18.
32. See R. Dean, 'Ms. Bodley 292 and the Canon of Nicholas Trevet's Works', Speculum, 17 (1942), 243-49. For Balliol 130, R.A.B. Mynors, Catalogue of the Manuscripts of Balliol College, Oxford 1963, pp. 108-10. B. L. Ullman, reviewing Mynors's book in Renaissance News, 18 (1965), 215-216, argues for the Italian provenance of these MSS.

33. 'Ipsa [providentia] enim disponit omnia membra in hominibus qualiter Seneca in libro primo De Quaestionibus Naturalibus dicit ipsam mentem esse universi ... Quia sicut mens lumine et virtute sua ambit totum corpus, sic aerem solaris lux et omnia subiciuntur ei et informantur per ipsam ... ita divina scilicet providentia operatur in universo quia ipsa est que ambit omnia, et omnia subiciuntur et informantur per ipsam', Bodley 292, fol.151^r; Balliol 130, fol.66^v.
34. 'Nos autem confitemur ipsum esse causam omnium que sunt, ideo cognoscit omnia tamquam omnium causa', Bodley fol.153^v; Balliol fol.71^v.
35. 'Deus verum secundum Senecam in primo libro De Quaestionibus naturalibus est quo maius excogitari non potest, sed hoc non patet esse nisi unum, ergo non sunt dii plures ... Forte per "deos" intelligit aliquas creaturas propter divinas operationes, ut puta angelos', Bodley, fol.152^r; Balliol, fol.68^v.
36. In his commentary on Boethius, for which Trevet was deeply indebted to an earlier one of William of Conches, Trevet disagrees precisely over the issue of the pre-existence of the soul. See C. Jourdain, 'Des commentaires inédits de Guillaume de Conches et de Nicolas Trevet sur la Consolation de Philosophie de Boèce', Notices et extraits de la Bibliothèque Impériale et autres Bibliothèques, 20, Paris 1962, 40-82; and P. Courcelle, La Consolation de Philosophie dans la tradition littéraire, Paris 1967, pp.318-9. Courcelle shows that Trevet's commentary was plagiarised by Renaud de Loubans' French translation of 1336, the one used by Chaucer for his own translation.
37. For Colonna, see A. Momigliano, 'Note sulla leggenda del Cristianesimo di Seneca', 23-4; R. Sabbadini, Le scoperte dei codici, pp.51-9; and W. Braxton Ross, Jr., 'Giovanni Colonna, Historian at Avignon', Speculum 45 (1970), 533-63. Ross presents transcriptions of some of Colonna's biographies, including Seneca's.
38. Momigliano proposes Colonna in the above article.
39. The twelfth-century catalogues of the monastic library at Bec do not have Lactantius on their lists. See G. Becker, op. cit., Nos. 86 and 127.
40. Ross, op.cit., p.556. Colonna quoting Lactantius 1, 5, 26-27; 6, 24, 12-13 and 16-18; 6, 25, 3-4.

41. Ross, *op.cit.*, 556-57. Colonna quoting Seneca's Letter to Lucilius 41; *Ad Marciam*, XXVI, 6-7; Letter to Lucilius, 110.

42. 'Duo quae pulcherrima sunt, quocumque nos moverimus, sequentur: natura communis et propria virtus. Id actum est, mihi crede, ab illo, quisquis formator universi fuit, sive ille deus est potens omnium, sive incorporalis ratio ingentium operum artifex, sive divinus spiritus per omnia maxima ac minima aequali intentione diffuses ...', VIII, 2-3.

43. 'Set potissime inducor ad credendum hunc fuisse christianum ex hiis epistolis notis toto orbi terrarum que scribuntur Pauli ad Senecam et Seneca ad Paulum', Ross, *op.cit.*, p.556.

44. T. Kaeppli, O. P., *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum Medii Aevi*, I, A-F, Rome 1970, 333-34. Peccioli's commentaries were composed some time before 1398, when Coluccio Salutati takes issue with his interpretations of Seneca's Letter I. See F. Novati, *Epistolario di C. S.*, Rome 1891-1911, III, 251-52. For introductory remarks, see Paris, Bib. Nat. MS Lat. 8555 (saec. XV), olim 5815, fols. 2^{IV}. Peccioli finds parallels between Seneca and verses from the Gospels and St Paul's Epistles, which would make Seneca more inspired than a mere theologian.

45. See my article, 'Gasparino Barzizza's Commentaries on Seneca's Letters', *Traditio*, 33 (1977), 297-358, for the development of the legend of Seneca's Christianity before and after Barzizza, who calls Seneca 'one of the hidden disciples of Paul', 'unum ex occultis discipulis Pauli' (p.346), in his long *Life of Seneca*, transcribed pp.342-50.